World Chronicle

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GUEST: Marcel Marceau
Goodwill Ambassador
United Nations Second World Assembly
On Ageing

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AGEING OF THE GLOBAL POPULATION

Humankind is ageing. Global society is already older than ever before in human history. Average life expectancy has increased by 20 years since 1950 to 66 years and is expected to extend a further ten years by mid-century. This means that the number of people over 60 will increase from about 6000 million in 2000 to almost 2 billion in 2050. The increase will be greatest in developing countries where the older population is expected to quadruple during the next fifty years. The United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing will address this most important challenge: the ageing of the global population. In this edition of **World Chronicle,** Goodwill Ambassador for the Second World Assembly on Ageing Marcel Marceau, the world's greatest mime, talks about the importance of the elderly in global society.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

The Second World Assembly on Ageing, which will take place in April 2002 in Spain, will address one of the main challenges of the twenty-first century – the ageing of the global population. Soon every third person will be over 60 and, for the first time in human history, the old and the young will represent an equal share of the population.

Our guest today is an internationally renowned artist. He is Marcel Marceau, often referred to as the world's greatest mime. Mr. Marceau is serving as the first Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing.

Joining me to talk to Mr. Marceau are Thalif Deen of *InterPress Service* and Walter Plaetlle of *Austria Presse Agentur/APA*.

Mr. Marceau, welcome to **World Chronicle**.

Maestro, Ambassador, what does one call you? Anyway, yours is an extraordinary talent. How did it happen? Why – before we talk about the World Assembly on Ageing and your duties as an advocate for the conference, tell us a bit about yourself – how you became a mime, the most famous mime in the world at the present time – and how can you use this extraordinary talent in the promotion of this UN thing?

MARCEAU: I think since I was a child. I remember I was four-five years old and the sister of my father took me to see Chaplin's film

LITTLEJOHNS: Chaplin?

MARCEAU: Chaplin's films, yes. I think it was "The Circus" because he filmed this in '26. And the film was silent but there was in Chaplin such a quality which moved me. He made me laugh, he made me cry. How can a child who is six years old or five years old suddenly be moved by the inside, by the soul of Chaplin? And then I started to imitate him. I stole the bowler of my father, his shoes, I made a moustache and I was doing Chaplin. But what was incredible was I did not make a caricature about Chaplin. I really was inside. It was here. And then when my aunt had a *colonie de vacance* – where children came from all parts of France – in Alsace Lorraine, I played Chaplin and I formed theatre with children. I was then eight, nine, ten years old. And then people saw me and said, "Marcel Marceau maybe will be an actor". They did not say especially a mime, an actor in the theatre. And of course, well, so

it was. And when I was with Decroux, when I was 20 years, Decroux said, "Marceau, you're a born mime".

LITTLEJOHNS: Is there a tradition of mime in France as there is in Japan, for example?

MARCEAU: Voila, that's a very good question. We had a tradition coming from the commedia dell'arte, not so much about the English pantomime school which was the musical with Grimaldi with Italian origins, with the British. And Chaplin and Stan Laurel were in the Fred Kamo company and they were musical acrobats and actors without speaking. Whereas Grimaldi, who was an acrobat before – the time when Dickens wrote a book about him, it was also in the 19th century before Chaplin, of course – Grimaldi sang, was an acrobat. And when Chaplin did later "Limelight" he was dressed a little like Grimaldi. Now, of course, when this admiration for Chaplin – there is a difference between Chaplin being a genius in mime but he was a middle reality. You could see the streets. His genius started really when he did films in Hollywood. And then when you see "City Lights", when you see "Modern Times", when you see "The Pilgrim", all of his mimes, he was a sort of Moliere like we have In France. He was even a sort of Victor Hugo.

LITTLEJOHNS: Did you ever meet Chaplin personally?

MARCEAU: Yes. I met him in the year '67. I had to play my one-man show in Paris at the Theatre de Champs-Elysee and then my friend Vadim who was with me at drama school called me: "I would like somebody to Barbarella". He was married at that time with Jane Fonda.

LITTLEJOHNS: That's right, yes. Roger Vadim.

MARCEAU: I said, "Well, I have to start in three-four weeks. Then I said, "Okay I need one week". "You will play Professor Pim". "Okay". I was only in my forties and I said okay. And then I am in the airport and who do I see? Charlie Chaplin with his wife going to Vevey, with three children. And then we met. And it was extraordinary because I said to the man who was a photographer and the other man who was an operator – they wanted to show Marcel Marceau and Chaplin together – it would be fantastic for "Match", for the papers – because they came with me to film Marcel Marceau making a film. They said, "Don't go with me. I don't want Chaplin to think that I want to make my publicity". I regret it now, you see. And then Chaplin was coming to me. "Oh, it's wonderful to see you. I saw your white face on all posters." I said "Mr. Chaplin". What can I say? I'm really dumb now. I cannot speak. I'm

so impressed. "You know when I was a child, I imitated you already ", and I started to mime Chaplin and Chaplin mimed Chaplin. And the people were furious because they cannot make the reportage. And then came the moment when Oona says to Chaplin –

LITTLEJOHNS: His wife, Oona O'Neill.

MARCEAU: – "Charlie, we have to go and take the plane." And then I took his hand, I kissed his hand and when I looked at his eyes he did – [BLINKS EYES AND SNIFFS].

LITTLEJOHNS: Really?

MARCEAU: Yeah, absolutely. And then I said, "I will never tell this to the press because they will say, 'who does he think he is'", you see. You are British and you would say the same thing maybe, how can you make Chaplin cry? Now there's a reason for that. When Chaplin went to London, 100,000 people, when he went to France – almost the same. At the airport nobody recognized him.

LITTLEJOHNS: Really?

MARCEAU: Yes. He had not made films for a long time. He had white hair, which is noble, he was good looking but they did not recognize Chaplin. And suddenly, when I kissed his hand, I represented the new generation who recognized him and also he thought maybe – we speak about ageing – "I have no more the time before me like before". And yet, there was a certain sadness.

DEEN: Mr. Marceau, as a mime, you have brought joy and laughter to millions of people throughout the world. There's so much suffering in the world today do you think laughter will be some form of relief?

MARCEAU: Well, I have in my programme deep numbers. I'm not an entertainer; I am a man of the theatre. I want to create mime theatre. What I brought to America is what America did not have. America had everything in the sense of musical comedies, ballet, concerts, films but not silence on the stage. And nobody could imagine that with silence you could express the weight of the soul – the hurt feeling. And very often when singers came or musicians they said, "Do you sing inside?" I said, "Yes". It's like a stream – the breathing the movement, the eyes and the body. Then it's from the family of dance but it was also from the family of pure acting and in this sense when you say I make people laugh, it's true. "Bip" makes people laugh but in some numbers I use synchronization. That means I do the "Creation of the World", which is a metaphor, I do "The Hands" which is a struggle of good

and evil. I do use "Maturity", "Old Age", "Death" which is showing a man from the cradle to the grave and "Bip" as a soldier who dies in a war. So even "Bip" remembers about what happened in the terrible 20th century – about the Holocaust, about Hiroshima, about what happened recently in New York and the Second World War, of course, because we had two wars. I think the 20th century was one of the most cruel centuries. I mean it absolutely. And hunger is still here today you see. And then I try to be deep in my art form. I make people laugh but I like also to bring poetry – depth. And this is why very often priests come after the show and they say to me, "Mr. Marceau, are you religious?" And I say, "Fathers, brothers, I don't practice. I'm not religious but when I do use "Maturity" or there's "Death", or "The Hands", or when I do use "Maturity", or even "The Creation of the World", God enters in me. And they say, "It's good".

PFAEFFLE: Mr. Marceau, why did you take on this responsibility – this appointment of being the Goodwill Ambassador? What can you contribute, exactly?

MARCEAU: Because I think that very often there is no respect for older people. Not in India. There's respect in India, in Japan, in the Asiatic world.

LITTLEJOHNS: France?

MARCEAU: Yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Yes?

MARCEAU: Not so much, no, it's true. Maybe in Spain. But the question is not here. It's because I tour so much that my body has kept young. I have the experience of a man of my age but when I play I find again my youth and my body has kept young. So young that sometimes young people go and say it cannot be Marcel Marceau, it must be his son who is playing, you see? But the depths of the art make it, I think. that older people have a great experience of life. And I think they accepted it because we have to teach. As long as we live we have to have a legacy and help the young people to understand what is history, what are the roots of our life, from where do we come from. Why do we love our country, not to be patriotic but what is the history of our people? And then it is very important that the young generation should know about history, about education against violence. And it's true that life is a tragedy but also a comedy then we have to share both. And in that sense, to be Ambassador is very important because I have to explain to the public that age does not mean that we have no quality anymore. As long as you have energy a part of yourself is young and

when you will – because you're younger than I – but the day you will have my age if you continue to search, to work, you stay young because energy keeps you young.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Marceau, as we do this programme you are preparing to go on a tour of the United States which will take you all the way out to Hawaii, I believe. You mentioned a few minutes ago about the terrible events of September the 11th, is there any way that you can bring in to your repertoire of mime something related to that?

MARCEAU: I did it already in "Modern and Future Life". In "Modern and Future Life" I show men in a world which is clicka-clicka-clicka-clicka. I created it '69. Sometimes you have a feeling that you predict things in art which maybe can happen later. And then in this pantomime man wants to change his heart or his brain to become younger and suddenly man does not want to become a robot and there is a fight between romanticism – the romanti movement and the mechanical movement. Romantic and cri-cri-cri-cri and the other moment there is an explosion, a nuclear explosion. And then a little tribute – the singe of apes is somewhere that has not been touched by the nuclear disaster. And then you an ape—

LITTLEJOHNS: An ape?

MARCEAU: An ape who takes two stones and [SOUND OF STONES HITTING EACH OTHER] fire and through fire man emerges. It's a metaphor. And I like very much in the theatre to bring the *connaissance* of that. and I can bring this magic feeling without changing. It comes from the body and the soul. And another pantomime, which is very important, was "Bip Remembers". It was about the Holocaust. It was about the man who die and bring us freedom because it's true that the Americans when they arrived in Paris from Cannes and the Russians, as I said, they crushed down the Nazis. At that time I was 20 years old. I fought side by side with the American GI's when Paris was liberated, of course. But I started before the study of mime in a great theatre school in '44 made three months before th Americans debarked in Cannes and I met my master, a grammarian, Etienne Decroux, who w influenced by Chaplin of course but in his style, his grammar he was influenced by Greek sculpture and also by Rodin. And mime in Europe started in Greece and then in Rome in the commedia dell'arte and then in the French Pantomime School. And this is why in the 19th century when you saw the film " Children of Paradise" and you saw Jean-Louis Barrault – wh was a student also of Dullin and Decroux – play Pierrot, then when I created "Bip" in '47 I decided to put white on my face for the memory of Pierrot. But "Bip" was a contemporary

mime because my pantomimes – when I did the wall or the birds here – [MAKES FLUTTERING SIGNS] making visible .....

LITTLEJOHNS: Sorry to interrupt but I have to. This is **World Chronicle.** Our guest is Marcel Marceau, the first Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing.

But when you did this [MAKES FLUTTERING SIGNS] I'm reminded that we had on this programme a couple of years ago, I think .Peter Ustinov ...

MARCEAU: Yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: And he is an Ambassador of Goodwill for UNICEF, one of several. And he told us about a visit to Beijing and he had a whole bunch of Chinese kids in Tiananmen Square and he was of course unable to communicate with them verbally, orally. But he was also a bit of a mime and he mimed pigeons taking off and he said all of the children looked up as if there were really pigeons going up into the air.

MARCEAU: But Ustinov is also a wonderful speaker. Even if he does not know the language he would say in Chinese – because I know him, we met in London ...

LITTLEJOHNS: Peter Ustinov?

MARCEAU: Yes, Peter Ustinov. He said (mimics Ustinov in Chinese, then in Russian). And we spoke – how do you call this – the false language. But I think he is a very gifted actor.

LITTLEJOHNS: Very gifted.

MARCEAU: Absolutely. But when you say this makes wonderful pantomimes, I'm traveling by sea and I see the birds [MIMES A BIRD FLYING] you see and I do hah!!! (touches cheek).

LITTLEJOHNS: Oh, it's exactly what he did.

MARCEAU: Yes, yes. He took it from me. No, but he is a great actor. He really is.

DEEN: Mr. Marceau, in your view who are some of the greatest comedians of this generation? There's Woody Allen, there's Jim Carrey, who do you think are the great comedians.

MARCEAU: Well, I think of very, very many great comedians. I like Dustin Hoffman. There are very good comedians like – you see when I came for the first time to America what did I bring to America that America did not have? Silence, as I said before. But

all the actors in Hollywood, even Shakespearean actors like, first of all, Charles Laughton who studied Shakespeare and was a great actor, the Marx Brothers, Ginger Rogers, Paul Muni, Gary Cooper, Cary Grant – Hollywood was there. What an honour for me! I was 30 years old, you know, and all the actors were there.

LITTLEJOHNS: Did you meet the Marx Brothers?

MARCEAU: Also yes, very much Harpo and Groucho, yes, yes. And of course, dancers came in the newer generation in 70's, 80's. Michael Jackson also, yes. When you saw "Walking in the Wind" he did the moonwalk. But he is a great dancer. A wonderful interpret singer. And I said "You know when you sing, you remind of the French poet Rimbaud." And he said, "Who is Rimbaud?" I bought the book and when I came back he was already reading Rimbaud. And he's a very, very strong poetic, I would say, dancer but the mime is in him too in a certain way.

PFAEFFLE: Mr. Marceau, you mentioned before that in the developing countries older people are taken care of better. In the West, it seems like a lot of time–

LITTLEJOHNS: In the developing countries?

PFAEFFLE: Yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: You mean more respectful?

PFAEFFLE: Yes. More respectful but–

MARCEAU: In Japan, in China, you can easily see a woman could fall in love with a man who is maybe 30 years more than she is. Old men, it's a respect because they have the experience of life. They're wise. And I think that it's not the same in Europe. You're absolutely right.

PFAEFFLE: No. What I meant to say is that old people are often taken in by their families so they have a place to live. But this country, often they are put in nursing homes and the result is that there's a lot of isolation. People feel isolated and this is something that I was wondering what your comment is.

MARCEAU: Yes. This is why I say to the young generation – because I teach young people in my school in Paris who are between 18 and 23 – I say if you don't go back to the past, if you don't know the history of your country, if you're not interested by culture, why do we live, where do we come from, and if you don't take the experience of older people who can be masters – because it takes a long time to become a master – you cannot be a master

when you are 20 years old or 30 years old. You can when you start to be 50-60 really. Then if you have no past, if you don't know the past, you have no future even if life has now evolved. But of course the progress which is in science is due to the past also. Development also. Newton influenced Einstein and Einstein influenced other great physicists and this is why for writing it's the same. Look at the popularity of "Les Miserables", "Miz", you see. I wan to say the late poets. All literature, all the people who died in the past are still alive. This is what we call culture. Look in China, Lao-Tze. You see, it's very, very important for young people to respect age.

DEEN: Mr. Marceau, when you spoke about Japan for example, when it comes to ageing there's a contrasting situation. In rich countries like Japan, the United States or Western Europe, people live to their 80's or 90's. But you have countries in sub-Saharan Africa like Sierra Leone, Burundi where the UN says they die – their life expectancy is about 38 or 40 years old. So you think ageing is more of a problem in rich countries than in poor countries?

MARCEAU: No. Actually it depends on the culture in a country. You see when a country starts only to be good looking – and in big universities, America's wonderful universities now the young generation starts also to think about the past and think also about tradition because you must understand that America has been done also with so many immigrants who came. And of course it was a new world as you say. And in Japan there was an old, old tradition. Also in Africa, you see. We said *le sauvage* but they had a great culture also in sculpture, in dance. They put on masks. I think that every country has a very strong culture. And look, even in England – we speak about England, about the Victorian age – every had to have a *melon*. Your hat, sir. Cravat, *melon*. It was too polite. And today there's a great freedom also. You can enter, you can be dressed. If I want to have a red shoe and a black shoe, if you want to put a mask on your face nobody is disturbed, you see. In that sense maybe it's goes too far. Maybe it's too much. But I want to say that youth now has a sense of freedom but I'm sure that England has also helped to create the character of Bip because Bip comes from Pip; "Great Expectations" by Dickens. I was a great admirer of the late poets, of Dickens and, of course, Chaplin, who was British. The world becomes smaller and smaller. You see, when I was in India for instance I met Sajit Ray six months before he died. He was a beautiful man; a great, great director of movies who went inside the life of Indians and also of poor people. And I'm always moved when an actor goes deep into the roots of life.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Marceau, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World** Chronicle. Twenty-eight minutes goes very fast.

Our guest has been Marcel Marceau, the first Goodwill Ambassador for the United Nations Second World Assembly on Ageing. He was interviewed by Thalif Deen of *Interpress* Service and Walter Pfaeffle of *Austrian Press/Agentur* APA. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827L, New York, N.Y., 10017.

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